

AESOP Sustainable Food Planning Conference

De Kemphaan, Almere, 9-10 October 2009

Report of the discussion on Saturday 10 October.

Part 1. Issues, topics, themes for a sustainable food planning agenda (plenary inventory)

Chair: prof Arnold van der Valk

The idea is to produce a list of concrete research topics. These will be framed by Terry Marsden in his overview of big issues.

1. Mapping opportunities and obstacles for improvement of local and regional food systems

Points in time when you take up opportunities. Food planning universal issue throughout Europe, but take it up step by step. Fast food as a key issue. Don't take on big issues!

Food 'deserts' (gathering data)

Social opportunity maps in selected cities and regions; not enough insight what type of consumers – no empirical view on type of consumers. Not dealt with in conventional food system; ethnic demands is a white spot.

Mapping vacant land and places for temporary i.e. nomadic agriculture – moving over these areas. Low investments costs, incorporating with house building projects. Mapping opportunities for green roof program and urban agriculture in relation to water management.

Research on driving forces. How will oil prices influence food prices; food availability and access in situations of crisis?

2. Alliances, networks, agents of change

The need to link up with other strong partners; not building something in a niche. Mapping strategic alliances.

How can planners support local initiatives? Bottom-up.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA's) in the peri-urban area in US. Works as a share holding by urban dwellers. If we don't have it, how to support it.

Interesting idea of coping with obstacles of young farmers (outsiders) to start a farm. Break through the closed shop with current inheritance.

Planning dimension could be about making land available.

Link between planning community and other professional groups; coalition forming is part of it, but not enough. E.g. link to architectural community. Also for communicating ideas to the wider public.

Community of food coalition. Community food assessments. Impact of food systems on local economy. Community garden share, location of outlets, Comparison between Europe and US case studies.

How do you bring about change; how to make the topic more visible; institutional analysis, identify institutions that may open doors. E.g. in US main planning organisation identified as institution to work with.

3. Metropolitan agricultural systems

Rural-urban linkages as an integral part of food planning; rural-urban divide. Goes well with ideas of peri-urban regions.

How to connect urban spaces with rural area – spatial connections.

Assumption that rural people live close to food production, and do not have difficulties with access to food; this may be a misconception.

4. **Closed local and regional nutrient systems and ecological foot print**

Cradle-to-cradle. How much city waste can be used in food system; organic standards; closed circles at regional level (not only at the farm level).

Deeper insight in actual waste of the city; what would be the highest type of sustainable use.

Climate change as an issue to be addressed with food planning – planning community should take lead debate. Fast majority comes from supermarkets which have distribution chains; food comes from all over the world. Engaging with corporate retailers; promoting local sourcing; rebalancing – if planners participate that would give more weight in this discussion.

Scenario building / designs (better grounding in research / theory)

5. **Mapping traditional and alternative food systems and the ecological and spatial impacts**

Looking at traditional and urban food systems as two components in reality, not as rivals. Role of food retailers, local food communities,

Role and regulations for wholesale markets; what barriers to overcome for local food compared to industrial food.

Competition should be addressed in policy and planning; e.g. in some regions 100% dominance of certain supermarket chains in the Netherlands. Lack of competition

Role of system innovation; how to judge innovation in food production. Who defines the standards? System innovation is different in organic compared to industrial production.

Integrated resource management research (taking both conventional and alternative into account – link to multifunctionality)

Link up with CAP reform discussions

6. **Mixed land uses**

Multifunctional land use approaches, integrated waste management, recreational needs as possible concrete issues to address in this context.

Recreational land uses and food production.

Food production and water management.

7. **Best practices**

Learning from other institutional approaches, systems; large 5-year projects including a large variety of issues.

Intercontinental comparison; learn from one another by identifying similarities and differences.

Comparative research.

Sharing examples, also across countries in Europe; best practices.

Influence of large corporate retailers and governments;

Communities of practice as a mean to share experiences.

Do we (planners) engage in the process of new food production?

Food quality indicator in Europe regulations needed.

Examples of functioning of urban agriculture (assessing & monitoring sustainability performance – transdisciplinary approach)

Public procurement (also related to the legal system)

8. Discourse

Narrative gap in planning speech and education; discourses in food discussion.

Law, legal professionals might be included; not present in today's discussion. Impact of legal system is large; don't start fighting them, but used their experience – public procurement.

Access to academic research by practitioners and NGO's.

Problem focused research, e.g. obesity. Purpose driven, that provides solutions.

Gap between consumer research (lot of things are already being addressed in social research, consumer studies) and planning research. Planners are very ignorant of what has been going on in consumer studies.

Planners are different types of people in the different countries. What types of planners and planning do we need? Which competencies are needed in food systems planning? Planners need to understand the essence of sustainable food circles (with its regional differences). Not only look at quantities but also qualities.

Part 2. Plenary discussion

Chair: Prof. Terry Marsden

Discuss and think about the big issues

Comments: exiting meeting, brought together a lot of planners and disciplines

Transition theory; in the past separating agriculture and planning domain; still institutional divisions that do not fit to issues we have to deal with.

Integration also hindered by the (up till 2008) setting of the arena in the rural area, related to recreation, and other issues, but not food.

We are expecting a lot more of the food system (health, food security...) than in the past.

Serious market and state failures in the system. How to facilitate more effective state and market win-win situations. Institutional vacuum. New types of production and food. New paradigms for urban and rural planning; we should forget about the divide and think of integrated planning. Paradigmatic shift in several ways: incorporating notions about planning into notions of agro-food; becoming needs to become (even) more interdisciplinary. It is not only about coping with land, but also flows of people, goods, water, ... New planning models of good and bad practice opening planning up in an interdisciplinary way, incorporating engineering, law, architecture. Try new ways to develop consistent vocabularies in these disciplines. Agro-food is a sector, but related to the wider sustainability agenda. Agro-sector is more integrated in complex of health, bio-science.

How to engage with practice; not only be interdisciplinary in an ivory tower, but also involvement in processes in practice. Transdisciplinary approaches. Phase of experimenting – think of ways to scale things up. But also normative modelling – what could be? Thinking in future scenarios needed.

Lot of literature on collaborative planning.

Discussion

Define small number of key areas of interdisciplinary themes

Identify who likes to be involved, resources...

Who is coordinating, what is the right institution for initiatives. Differences between countries – is the EU the common authority?

Comparison of best practices; comparative study between continents – US, Europe and China.

Working group community; how to make use of the resources in the group of these two days. Context of AESOP.

Cooperating within the planning profession, between the different types of planners, is needed to address the issues of food planning. That is a big challenge at itself; a big leap forward if we can succeed in this.

Attachment of this meeting to AESOP may lead to integrating of food planning in planning curricula in Europe.

Production and consumption countryside; more intensive use of space. We should see things in the context of feeding 9 billion in 2050.

Things going on in design discipline, e.g. visioning by NAI, but not underpinned by solid arguments and rationale. We should link to this.

Gather arguments showing normativity is always there; support normative stands in the scientific debate. Be critical and know about the assumptions behind science. Topic not discussed enough: facts and values. Neglected in the theoretical debate.

Need for evidence, we need to know about research, in planning practice. Problem in environmental agenda is fragmentation of knowledge; need for understanding in urban planning in a more connectivity sense.

There are already designs out there; commenting on these designs is useful. Easy approach and quick win-win. Also changes the role of planning: reflecting on practices instead of building things from scratch. Down-to-earth food systems – what is happening there?

Are we committed to a dual approach? We should support and involve both industrial and urban agriculture movement.

Planning should come out of the closet and influence CAP.

Part 3. Wrap-up

By Prof. Kevin Morgan

Debate about who are the planners. I don't care. But some of traditional planners are discovering food. But this is an issue far outside planning alone.

Rob Hopkins – urge to begin with food. Food is multidimensional. There will never be a single food agenda. This diversity is strength.

We are locally based and globally engaged. Cosmopolitan focus.

Academics and NGOs involved. But we need analysis and practices as well. AESOP website will be a basic account for this food planning meeting, but also do something with it on own websites. Annual AESOP food planning meeting. Maybe next one in Brighton, UK.
We need to discuss how we organize ourselves in AESOP.

Two practical issues: how do we constitute ourselves, and how shall we meet in future.

Virtual meeting place to constitute the discussions. Place to post things up. Good way to enhance our dialogue next year.

Start modestly and built things up gradually.

Written report of today's meeting, list of participants at the ISOMUL website. Material of the meeting, presentations. Available during the next week.

Voting system. These are 10 issues. Ask people what they think are the priority ones. Organisers should propose research priorities, to be discussed in thematic group meetings. Kevin Morgan volunteers as a coordinator. Arnold van der Valk will act as back up. Han Wiskerke will be participant.

We will act in close cooperation with our American counterparts in ACSP and APA. Use networks of participants.

How elitarian is our approach? We may also need representatives from developing countries. Link to counterparts in these countries. We will need to grow in an organic way in the next years, and to find solutions to common problems.